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What Is CIA?

By Richard Starnes

A small, but possibly significant, insight into ourselves as others see us is to be obtained in reading an account of Fidel Castro's reaction to the news that the American President had been murdered.



He was, of course, deeply concerned with the nature of his new adversary -- Lyndon B. Johnson. Writing in the current New Republic, Jean Daniel, who was with Castro when he heard of Mr. Kennedy's assassination, reports that the Cuban dictator asked:

"Who is Lyndon Johnson? What is his reputation? What were his relations with Kennedy? With Khrushchev? What was his position at the time of the attempted invasion of Cuba?"

Then:

"What authority does he exercise over the CIA?"

SHIELDED AS they are from the realities of life, Americans are easy to placate and reassure on the score of such cloudy organisms as the Central Intelligence Agency. Not so, however, are sophisticated foreigners, particularly foreigners against whom the CIA is waging war. Castro falls within this category.

The unlikely figure of Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia is another alien prince-ling whose thoughts are much with the shadowy spooks of the CIA. So much so, indeed, that he turned off the U. S. foreign aid spigot that had poured \$355 million into his country, chucked out the U. S. aid mission and U. S. military advisers, and may have condemned his country to the gravitational lure of Communist China—all because he believed the CIA

was assisting rebels seeking to overthrow him.

It is possible to reject the maunderings of such as Sihanouk and Castro. But it is not so easy to turn aside episodes such as a conversation with an American official of high rank (and immense personal prestige) who was then stationed in the Far East. We had been talking about the CIA, when he said:

"I have a security clearance, which is the highest anyone can have, and I thought I pretty much knew what was going on. But I have been appalled by what I've seen here. I seriously question whether President Kennedy himself has any effective control over this monstrous bureaucracy."

CASTRO'S QUESTION, then, is perhaps not so foolish as it might first appear to be.

President Johnson may be forgiven if his special commission to examine into the murder of John F. Kennedy seems on sober second thoughts to be a curiously ill-assorted group. He had many problems nagging at him and consuming his time; he unquestionably sought the advice of the chief justice, among others, and it is clear now that some of the advice he obtained was poorly considered.

If he had had any idea of the tremendous CIA psychosis that is abroad in the world today, he most certainly would not have named Allen W. Dulles to the extraordinary commission. Mr. Dulles headed the CIA for eight years, a tenure which spanned such dismal episodes as the U-2 incident and the Bay of Pigs disaster, and he now seems bent on spending his declining years as apologist without portfolio for the huge, bumbling espionage apparatus.

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